



# NEWS RELEASE

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## **DUCK FALL FLIGHT EXPECTED TO BE LARGEST SINCE 1979**

Boosted by 3 years of plentiful rain and snowfall in key nesting areas, more than 80 million ducks will fly south this fall according to preliminary U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates, Acting Director John Rogers announced July 27 at a joint meeting of the four flyway councils in Kansas City. This would be the largest fall flight since 1979.

"All we have now is a preliminary estimate but, at the moment, everything looks good for an impressive southern migration," Rogers said. The official estimate will be released in early August.

"We've come a long way since the drought of the late 1980s when the fall flight was 57 million ducks," he said. "We can be thankful for the abundance of water but we also must applaud the habitat conservation work done by the partners of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and by hunters and other conservationists."

The resurgence in duck populations has made it possible for the Service to extend hunting seasons and expand bag limits in the past 2 years. The flyway councils will make their recommendations to the Service on the 1996-97 waterfowl hunting season at the joint meeting and the Service's Regulations Committee will announce the proposed regulations August 2.

The good news on the estimated fall flight follows the results of the annual spring breeding duck survey, which recorded an estimated 37.5 million breeding ducks in the key nesting areas, up 5 percent from 35.9 million in 1995. The survey samples 1.3 million square miles across the north-central United States, western and northern Canada, and Alaska and estimates the number of ducks in important breeding areas.

Populations of four species--gadwall, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, and canvasback--reached record highs. In particular, blue-winged teal, up 25 percent to 6.4 million, and northern shoveler, up 21 percent to 3.4 million, showed substantial gains.

"We must keep in mind that these are the good times when we have abundant water on the prairies," Rogers said. "If the past is any indication, there will be drier years sometime in the future. Therefore, we must continue our efforts to conserve and restore

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wetland habitat. We need to ensure we have a large base of habitat that will be available year in and year out regardless of how much snow and rain fall."

Rogers also said the Service is considering a proposal to allow states to set aside a "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day," providing young people an extra hunting day before or after the regular waterfowl season.

If the proposal is enacted, states would be able to select one "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day" in addition to their regular duck season. The day would be held outside of any regular duck season on either a weekend or holiday when young Americans would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The day could be held up to 10 days before or after any regular duck season and within any split of a regular duck season. The youngsters would have to be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old who would not be allowed to hunt.

"Hunters have traditionally been the strongest allies of conservation," Rogers said. "We want to open the opportunity for a new generation to enjoy this time-honored sport and learn the conservation ethic that has always been part of America's hunting tradition. Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day will do just that."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 508 national wildlife refuges encompassing 92 million acres, as well as 72 national fish hatcheries.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and assists foreign governments in their conservation efforts. It oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.